

INTRODUCTION TO THE TAI DIALECT OF PING SIANG

Ping Siang (PS) is located near the Vietnamese border about twenty-five miles west of Ning Ming. Ping Siang is referred to in a number of different ways: phvŋ⁴ saaj⁴ following the Mandarin pronunciation, phaŋ⁴ chvŋŋ⁴ following the Cantonese pronunciation, and dau¹ laaj⁴ following the local pronunciation. The informant, Chiu Hahn (caaw³ hvŋ⁴ following the Mandarin), was interviewed in Hong Kong from June 13 through 19 and from July 3 through 15, 1966. He was educated in Lungchow and lived there for seven years from about the age of twelve. At the time of the interviewing, he had lived in Hong Kong for about twenty years and had not lived in Ping Siang since the age of twenty. He referred to his language as thoo³ as in goo² kyaaj³ thoo³ vaa⁵ 'I speak Tho'. Mr. Dominic Yip assisted in the interviewing.

References to this dialect can be found in Gedney's "Linguistic Diversity among Tai Dialects in Southern Kwangsi" [see this volume].

In phonological structure, the Tai dialect of Ping Siang, like all other languages of the Tai family, shows distinctions in syllable-initial consonant, in vocalic nucleus, in syllable-final consonant, and in tone. The following phonological

description has been determined from the available data.

Tones. On open syllables (those ending with a final vowel, semivowel, or nasal), Ping Siang has six tones. These tones, along with pitch levels and contours based on the Chao 5-level pitch scale (Chao 1930), include the following:

- 1 - mid level, 33: kaa¹ 'crow'.
- 2 - high level, 55: saa² 'incorrect'.
- 3 - rising, 24: naa³ 'face'.
- 4 - low-falling, 21: kaa⁴ 'stuck'.
- 5 - low level, 11: kaa⁵ 'branch'.
- 6 - falling, glottalized, 31: kaa⁶ 'to tell'.

Checked syllables (those ending in *p t k*) with short vowels have tones phonetically similar to tones 2 and 4 of open syllables; usually tone 5 appears on syllables that have cognates elsewhere with a long vowel, for example *lop*⁵ 'to stroke' (Siamese *luup*³). Checked syllables with long vowels have tones phonetically similar to tones 2 and 5 of open syllables.

The historical origins of this tonal system can be represented as follows:

INITIALS	TONES			D	
	A	B	C	short	long
aspirate	1	2	3	2	2
plain	1	2	3	2	2
glottal	1	2	3	2	2
voiced	4	5	6	4,5	5

Consonants. The following initial consonants have been recorded:

Voiceless unaspiated stops. p t c k ʔ: pin⁴ 'to become', tik² 'to hit', cim⁴ 'to taste', kyn⁴ 'person', ʔaw¹ 'to take'.

Voiceless aspirated stops. ph th kh: phaay³ 'to walk', thvŋ¹ 'sugar', khim¹ 'needle'.

Voiced stops. b d: baan³ 'village', duu¹ 'to watch'.

Voiced nasals. m n ŋ: moo⁴ 'ox', nuw⁶ 'meat', ŋuu⁴ 'snake'.

Voiceless spirants. f ʃ s h: fay⁴ 'fire', ʃip² 'ten', siik² 'to tear', hom² 'to cover'.

Voiced sonorants. v l y: van⁴ 'day', lok⁵ 'child', yoom⁶ 'to dye'.

Initial clusters with w include kw khw: kwaa² 'to pass', khwi² 'to ride'.

Initial clusters with y include py phy ky khy by my: pyaa⁶ 'orphan', phyak² 'vegetable', kyaan³ 'to speak', khyay² 'egg', byook² 'flower', myaak⁵ 'slippery'.

A single kl cluster appears in klik² (sound of a partridge).

Final consonants include p t k m n ŋ w y ʔ: cap² 'to perch', mvt⁴ 'ant', cvvk⁵ 'rope', dam¹ 'dark', fvn⁴ 'firewood', kaan³ 'fishbone', haw² 'to bark', ʔaay² 'cliff', khaŋ³ 'near'.

Vowels. In the Tai dialect of Ping Siang, seven vowels have been recorded with a length distinction in each:

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High. i,ii u,uu u,uu: ɭim¹ 'heart', ciɨŋ¹ 'first',
nɯŋ¹ 'one', ɭuuk² 'to glance', duy³ 'together', kuuy³
'banana'.

Mid. ɤ,ɤɤ: mɤt⁴ 'ant', mɤɤŋ¹ 'ditch'.

Low. e,ee a,aa o,oo: ʔet² 'one', heek² 'pan',
ʔay¹ 'to cough', ʔaay¹ 'to lean on', dok² 'bone',
boot² 'blind'.

Diphthongs include a vocalic nucleus followed by
w y ɯ: deew² 'only one', ʔooy³ 'sugarcane', maɯ² 'new'.

In the transcription system used, e is phonet-
ically closer to [e] and o to [ɔ]. Actual pronuncia-
tion of syllable-final vowels is close to a long
vowel and is therefore written with a double vowel.

William J. Gedney's

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Thomas John Hudak

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